

Destination Stewardship for Regenerative Tourism: Governance Mechanisms, Implementation Pathways, and Measurable Outcomes

*Destination
Stewardship for
Regenerative Tourism*

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ABSTRACT

Regenerative tourism addresses the limits of growth-led models, but literature remains fragmented in explaining how destination transitions are conceptualized, governed, implemented, and evaluated in practice. This study systematically reviews how destination stewardship is understood and operationalized within regenerative tourism transitions, focusing on five related questions concerning conceptualization, governance mechanisms and stakeholder arrangements, implementation pathways, measurable outcomes and indicators, and practical destination application. A Scopus-based systematic literature review of English-language, journal articles published between 2016 and 2026 was conducted, and 18 studies were included following PRISMA-based screening and eligibility assessment. The findings show that destination stewardship is emerging less as a settled concept than as a place-based, multi-actor, and restorative governance orientation. Governance is the primary operational mechanism through which regenerative transition is pursued, implementation pathways are adaptive, staged, and context-sensitive, and measurable outcomes remain the weakest part of the evidence base. Practical application is most consistently expressed through five principles: reframing destination purpose beyond growth, building governance capacity, implementing adaptively, tailoring strategy to place, and monitoring beyond conventional tourism metrics. The review contributes a review-derived analytical framework and highlights the need for clearer conceptual boundaries, stronger comparative research, and more robust destination-level regenerative indicators.

Keywords: *Destination Stewardship, Place-Based Development, Regenerative Tourism, Restorative Governance.*

INTRODUCTION

Overtourism, ecological degradation, social unrest, and fragmented governance are increasingly challenging tourism destinations (Tops & Lamers, 2024; Diah, 2025; Mananda et al., 2025). Destinations face environmental decline, social friction, and reduced place-based quality, which often exceed institutional and community capacity to manage growth (Salvatore et al., 2018; Hall et al., 2024). In response, conventional growth-oriented tourism strategies have been criticized for prioritizing visitor numbers, competitiveness, and economic impact while neglecting long-term resilience, legitimacy, and place wellbeing (Duarte et al., 2024).

Ferretti et al. (2023) and McKeeman et al. (2026) argue that increasing destination pressures require a shift toward regenerative tourism. This approach goes beyond minimizing negative impacts by restoring ecosystems, fostering reciprocity and care, and enhancing the long-term vitality of socio-ecological systems and communities (Duarte et

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al., 2024). Regenerative tourism seeks to rebuild natural, cultural, and social capital to support both destination wellbeing and the sustainability of the tourism industry, including social balance for local communities (Izzah & Islam, 2024). However, despite growing attention, regenerative tourism remains underdeveloped in terms of clear implementation guidance and is often conceptually diluted or misunderstood (Bellato & Pollock, 2025). Its realization requires systemic change in mindset, governance, and practice, yet faces resistance due to organizational inertia, dominant recovery narratives, uneven power relations, and limited practical tools (Dredge, 2022).

Destination stewardship is therefore proposed as a bridging framework between regenerative principles and practical destination management. It emphasizes responsible place-based care, shared resource management, multi-stakeholder collaboration, and balancing resident, visitor, and destination needs over time (McKeeman et al., 2026). Stewardship also aligns with governance approaches that prioritize legitimacy, accountability, collaboration, and broader success metrics beyond growth-oriented measures (Wibowo et al., 2025). In this sense, stewardship operationalizes regenerative aspirations through inclusive and balanced destination governance (Imbsen et al., 2021).

The literature suggests that destination stewardship is often implied rather than explicitly defined, emerging through related concepts such as guardianship, care, community wellbeing, ecological restoration, cultural continuity, justice, and long-term responsibility for place (Ferretti et al., 2023). However, regenerative tourism remains conceptually ambiguous, with unclear analytical boundaries and uneven alignment with its deeper ecological and relational paradigm (Bellato & Pollock, 2025). Current studies also identify diverse governance arrangements linked to stewardship, including collaborative, community-based, state-enabled, and multi-level approaches (Imbsen et al., 2021). This highlights the need for a clearer and more consistent conceptual framework for destination-level implementation.

Salvatore et al. (2018) and Hall et al. (2024) highlight operationalization as a key challenge because regenerative tourism is adaptive, staged, and context-specific rather than linear or universally replicable. Ferretti et al. (2023) note that although outcomes such as ecological restoration, wellbeing, resilience, inclusion, and place flourishing are emphasized, measurable indicators remain limited. Cave et al. (2022), Dredge (2022), and Duarte et al. (2024) further stress that, despite requiring systemic transformation in values, governance, and practice, regenerative tourism implementation is constrained by institutional resistance, weak community centrality, and limited practical tools.

A further gap concerns destination application, where existing literature still offers limited integrated guidance for destinations facing similar pressures (Dredge, 2022). The core challenge is not a lack of ideas, but the absence of an integrated framework to translate regenerative concepts into practical destination-level implementation. This review, therefore, seeks to synthesize existing literature to clarify destination stewardship within regenerative tourism transitions, including governance mechanisms, implementation pathways, outcome assessment, and practical implications for destination management.

This study aims to systematically synthesize how destination stewardship is conceptualized and operationalized within regenerative tourism transitions at the destination level. The review examines five key aspects, namely the conceptualization of destination stewardship governance mechanisms, stakeholder arrangements, regenerative transition pathways, measurable outcomes and indicators, and practical implications for destination-level application. It is guided by research questions on how stewardship is conceptualized within regenerative tourism, what governance and stakeholder configurations support transitions, how implementation pathways are structured, how outcomes are measured, and how findings can inform destination-level practice. This review clarifies destination stewardship as an emerging governance orientation within regenerative tourism, synthesizing fragmented literature across conceptual, governance, implementation, evaluation, and application dimensions. It also proposes an integrative framework and transferable principles to support destination-level regenerative practice.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptual Foundations of Destination Stewardship and Regenerative Tourism

Destination stewardship has evolved from conservation ethics into a governance-oriented framework for managing tourism destinations. It refers to the responsible management of a destination to preserve its natural, cultural, social, and economic resources for present and future generations. The World Travel and Tourism Council positions it as a governance approach that balances economic, environmental, and socio-cultural needs through participatory structures involving public, private, and community stakeholders. In parallel, regenerative tourism has emerged as a more transformative paradigm rooted in regenerative development traditions informed by Western science and Indigenous knowledge systems, alongside critiques of sustainable tourism being absorbed into growth-oriented agendas (Bellato et al., 2023).

The relationship between both concepts is complementary yet distinct. Regenerative tourism prioritizes the socio-ecological well-being of destinations by positioning stewardship as a mechanism to enable meaningful and reciprocal stakeholder participation across the tourism system (Iddawala & Lee, 2025). In this sense, destination stewardship functions as an operational governance framework, while regenerative tourism represents a deeper paradigm shift in values and systems thinking (Budarma & Erawati, 2025). Accordingly, holistic destination development requires integration of ecological, social, and governance dimensions through collaboration, stewardship, and environmental ethics (Paddison & Hall, 2024).

Despite increasing scholarly attention, a conceptual gap remains. Regenerative tourism is still marked by ambiguity, limiting its translation into planning and management practice (Iddawala & Lee, 2025). This lack of clarity creates uncertainty and resistance among practitioners, as its implications for governance and stakeholder decision-making remain underdefined (Pung et al., 2024). Addressing this gap is essential to bridge stewardship principles and regenerative ideals into actionable destination policies.

Governance and Implementation Pathways in Regenerative Destination Transitions

Effective governance mechanisms are central to the operationalization of regenerative destination transitions. Hartman (2023) proposes that theorizing tourism destinations as complex adaptive systems offers a powerful analytical lens for understanding destination development, drawing explicit attention to the levels of individual actors, emergent structures, the structure-agency interface, and the system level, all of which are indispensable for designing adaptive governance frameworks. This complexity-informed governance approach underscores the importance of multi-level coordination, whereby strategic storytelling, institutional alignment, and adaptive policy execution must work in concert across scales to enable genuine regenerative transitions.

At the stakeholder arrangement level, Gerke et al. (2024) demonstrate through an ethnographic case study in Tasmania that implementing regenerative practices requires entrepreneurs and destination actors to disrupt the status quo by drawing on social networks instead of financial resources, altering discourses and mindsets, and pushing for transformative change within their operating systems. This aligns with Crabolu et al.'s (2026) finding that destination management organizations need to broaden their activities beyond traditional promotion to include stewardship, management, and regenerative marketing, thereby bridging the gap between regenerative tourism's theoretical foundations and real-world practice.

In terms of operationalization and outcomes, the review by Iddawala and Lee (2025) identifies that achieving holistic outcomes in regenerative destination governance requires not only horizontal local collaboration but also vertical and multidisciplinary collaboration, recognizing tourism as a subsystem co-existing within a broader destination ecology. Despite these advances, critical implementation gaps remain. Crabolu et al. (2026) note that Destination Management Organizations (DMOs) frequently lack clear mandates and sufficient institutional capacity to operationalize

regenerative transitions, while Ridanpää (2025) cautions that studies on regenerative tourism enterprises remain largely limited to individual case studies, with broader frameworks for scaling regenerative practices across diverse destination contexts still absent from the literature.

Multi-Stakeholder Engagement in Regenerative Tourism

Stakeholder collaboration is a critical enabler of regenerative tourism and destination stewardship, requiring active participation from communities, businesses, government agencies, and destination management organizations. Regenerative outcomes depend on interconnected governance networks and shared responsibility rather than isolated institutional action. Recent evidence highlights the importance of multi-level engagement in supporting transformative destination change. For example, Nuraini and Gunarto (2025) show that multi-stakeholder collaboration strengthens local economic regeneration and sustainability through shared governance structures, while Montes de Oca (2024) argues that effective destination governance relies on coordinated stakeholder participation across multiple levels and methods. Together, these studies indicate that stakeholder agency and relational capital are fundamental to achieving regenerative tourism outcomes.

Furthermore, Inversini and Buhalis (2025) argue that digital technologies can strengthen stakeholder coordination and governance effectiveness in regenerative tourism by improving communication, data sharing, and collaborative decision-making processes. However, Montes de Oca (2024) notes that many destinations still face fragmentation in governance structures, which limits the effectiveness of multi-stakeholder collaboration in practice. This indicates that while stakeholder engagement is widely recognized as essential, its operationalization remains inconsistent across destinations. The literature suggests that effective regenerative tourism requires integrated stakeholder ecosystems characterized by trust, shared vision, and coordinated governance structures. These elements form a foundational pillar within the analytical framework of regenerative destination transformation.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a standalone Systematic Literature Review (SLR) to synthesize how destination stewardship is conceptualized and operationalized within regenerative tourism transitions. An SLR was appropriate because the field remains conceptually fragmented across governance, implementation, outcomes, and practical destination application (Varsha et al., 2024). The literature search was conducted in Scopus, using two TITLE-ABS-KEY queries. Query 1 served as the main conceptual search by combining destination terms, stewardship and governance terms, and regenerative or transition terms. Query 2 extended this structure by adding implementation and evaluation-oriented terms to better capture language related to pathways, processes, frameworks, indicators, outcomes, metrics, evaluation, and monitoring. The search was limited to English-language, final-stage journal articles. A predefined publication window of 2016-2026 was then applied during the screening process, with records outside the window removed prior to eligibility assessment. The full Scopus search strategy and applied filters are reported in Supplementary File S2 for transparency and replicability (Okoli, 2015; Sauer & Seuring, 2023; Marzi et al., 2025).

Eligibility criteria, aligned with the review objectives and RQ1–RQ5, required Scopus-indexed studies addressing destination-level tourism through governance, implementation, outcomes, or practical applications. Included studies comprised both direct-fit research on destination stewardship and regenerative tourism transitions and adjacent studies offering transferable insights on governance, planning, implementation, or evaluation. Studies were excluded if tourism was not central, lacked destination-level relevance, or were conceptually unrelated to stewardship in regenerative transitions. Screening was conducted by the first author, with supervisory review by the second and

third authors, and all decisions were documented in an audit trail to ensure transparency and consistency.

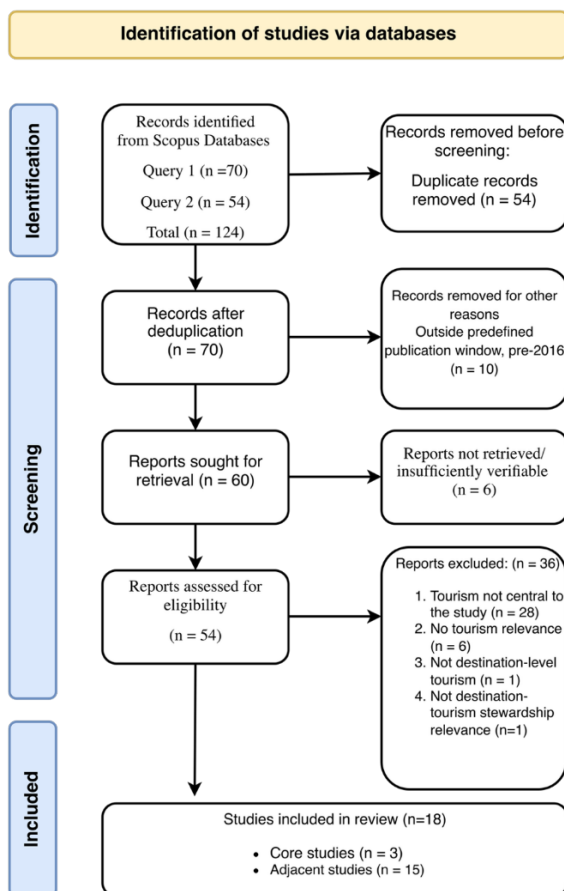


Figure 1. PRISMA 2020 Flow Diagram of The Study Selection Process

Figure 1 shows the PRISMA 2020 flow diagram of the literature review process based on two Scopus searches that identified 124 records (Query 1 = 70; Query 2 = 54). After removing 54 duplicates, 70 unique records remained. A further 10 records outside the 2016–2026 inclusion period were excluded, leaving 60 records for screening. Six records could not be retrieved or verified, resulting in 54 full-text articles assessed for eligibility. Of these, 36 were excluded due to lack of central tourism focus (n = 28), limited tourism relevance (n = 6), or insufficient destination-level or stewardship relevance (n = 2). Ultimately, 18 studies were included in the qualitative synthesis, consisting of 3 core studies and 15 adjacent studies (Page et al., 2021).

Data extraction was conducted using a structured spreadsheet template capturing bibliographic information, destination context, study objectives and methods, key findings, governance and stewardship relevance, regenerative transition relevance, practical application value, and evidence related to RQ1–RQ5. Following full-text review, studies were classified as core, adjacent, or excluded, with decisions documented in an audit trail. Screening assessed eligibility, conceptual fit, destination-level relevance, and contributions to governance, implementation, outcomes, or practice. Given the heterogeneous sample, a thematic-narrative synthesis organized findings across the five research questions to identify recurring themes, transferable principles, evidence gaps, and ensure transparency, consistency, and reproducibility.

RESULTS

Overview of Included Studies and the Concept of Destination Stewardship

Table 1 summarizes the 18 studies included in the review, comprising 3 core and 15 adjacent studies across diverse geographical contexts. The core studies primarily emphasize regenerative tourism through integrated governance, wellbeing-oriented planning, and participatory ecotourism, forming the conceptual foundation of the synthesis. The adjacent studies extend these insights by highlighting key enabling and constraining factors such as governance maturity, stakeholder participation, capacity building, policy design, and institutional coordination in destination-level transitions. The literature demonstrates that regenerative and sustainable tourism transitions are strongly shaped by multi-actor governance systems, iterative planning processes, and context-specific implementation pathways, with outcomes depending on the alignment between governance structures, stakeholder inclusion, and place-based management approaches.

Table 1. Characteristics of the included studies and their primary contribution

No	Study	Context	Method	Class	Main contribution	Role in synthesis
1	Mananda et al. (2025).	Bali, Indonesia	Mixed	Core	Penta-helix governance & overtourism mitigation sustainability	RQ1–RQ5 (mainly RQ2–RQ5)
2	McKeeman et al. (2026).	Aotearoa New Zealand	Qualitative	Core	Regenerative planning based on wellbeing and local values	RQ1–RQ5
3	Ferretti et al. (2023).	Tutukaka, New Zealand	Qualitative	Core	Restorative ecotourism through participation and conservation	RQ1–RQ5
4	Tops and Lamers (2024)	Philippines	Qualitative	Adjacent	Environmental gains with justice and legitimacy tensions	RQ2–RQ5
5	Salvatore et al. (2018).	Italy	Mixed	Adjacent	Staged tourism transition process	RQ3
6	Hall et al. (2024).	New Zealand	Qualitative	Adjacent	Trigger events and the importance of governance	RQ2–RQ4
7	Paddison and Hall (2023)	UK	Qualitative	Adjacent	Spatial justice and stakeholder participation	RQ2–RQ5
8	Wu and Tsai (2016)	Taiwan	Qualitative	Adjacent	Stakeholder capacity building	RQ2–RQ5
9	Puig-Cabrera and Foronda-Robles (2025)	Spain	Quantitative	Adjacent	Evolutionary governance maturity in tourism transition	RQ2–RQ3
10	Berdugo et al. (2025).	Colombia	Mixed	Adjacent	Value-chain coordination and innovation	RQ2–RQ5
11	Pranajaya et al. (2025).	Bali, Indonesia	Policy case	Adjacent	Adaptive planning and participatory development	RQ3–RQ5
12	Cave et al. (2022).	Global	Conceptual	Adjacent	Barriers: power, inertia, limited tools	RQ1–RQ3
13	Ruttenberg (2023)	Costa Rica	PAR	Adjacent	Community-based alternative development pathways	RQ3–RQ5
14	Fragkoudi and Gritzali (2026)	Europe	Comparative	Adjacent	Governance shapes inclusion and destination identity	RQ2–RQ5

No	Study	Context	Method	Class	Main contribution	Role in synthesis
15	Sampieri and Mazzetto (2025)	Italy & Saudi Arabia	Comparative	Adjacent	PPP effectiveness depends on governance design	RQ2–RQ5
16	Montealegre (2019)	Spain	Qualitative	Adjacent	Place-sensitive participatory recovery	RQ3–RQ5
17	Nicolini et al. (2025).	Italy	Qualitative	Adjacent	Incremental destination improvement strategies	RQ5
18	Musavengane (2018)	Zimbabwe	Conceptual	Adjacent	Inclusive governance and fair benefit distribution	RQ2–RQ5

Across the included studies, destination stewardship is more often implied than explicitly defined. It is rarely presented as a single settled concept, and appears through discussions of destination responsibility, regenerative change, and the broader purposes of tourism development (Ferretti et al., 2023; McKeeman et al., 2026). The clear concept was founded on three core studies, which conceptualize stewardship through collaborative destination governance in Bali, community wellbeing and guardianship in Aotearoa New Zealand, and place-based restorative care in marine ecotourism (Mananda et al., 2025).

In Bali, stewardship is expressed through penta-helix coordination rather than reliance on market-led responses, emphasizing collaboration among government, academia, business, community, and media actors to restore ecological, cultural, and community systems (Mananda et al., 2025). McKeeman et al. (2026) support the finding and stated that stewardship is conceptualized through a shift away from visitor-centric destination management towards community wellbeing, place-based value, and a guardianship orientation in Aotearoa New Zealand. At this stage, the first recurring strand conceptualizes stewardship as collaborative, multi-actor destination governance to reorient the objective towards collective responsibility for long-term place wellbeing instead of traditional tourism success.

Ferretti et al. (2023) suggest that restorative and place-based approaches are needed to collectively care for ecological value, community participation, local knowledge, and the maintenance of the “specialness of place”. A broader perspective emerges from the adjacent studies in Sanur, Bali, and Mar Menor, Spain, through culturally grounded spatial governance, heritage protection, and locally embedded recovery settings (Montealegre, 2019; Pranajaya et al., 2025). Additionally, a more normative strand frames stewardship as justice-sensitive and locally accountable transition governance, occurring when destination change affects recognition, participation, and the distribution of costs and benefits, as reflected in Boracay and the tourist-historic city case (Paddison & Hall, 2023; Tops & Lamers, 2024). Taken together, the reviewed studies do not support reading destination stewardship as a settled, standalone construct. A convincing interpretation is that it is still emerging as a destination-level governance orientation, grounded in long-term responsibility for place and expressed through relational accountability and the protection and restoration of social, cultural, and ecological conditions.

Governance Mechanisms and Stakeholder Arrangements

Across the included studies, regenerative tourism governance is consistently framed as collaborative, hybrid, and multi-level rather than a single dominant model. It operates through combinations of public authority, local coordination, cross-sector partnerships, and stakeholder participation. Bali illustrates this through a penta-helix model linking government, academia, business, community, and media, while McKeeman et al. (2026) highlight a structured mix of national direction and regional discretion with engagement of residents, iwi, councils, and operators in Aotearoa New Zealand. Ferretti et al. (2023)

and Mananda et al. (2025) further emphasize community-led governance in restorative marine ecotourism supported by regulatory frameworks.

Across governance-focused studies, key stakeholders consistently include government bodies, local communities, private tourism actors, civil society, and knowledge institutions, with Boyacá and Andalusia supporting this pattern (Berdugo et al., 2025; Puig-Cabrera & Foronda-Robles, 2025). In some contexts, indigenous actors are central due to legitimacy and place-based rights, while in other cases, participation extends to MSMEs, artisans, heritage actors, protected-area authorities, and informal workers, depending on context (Wu & Tsai, 2016; Pranajaya et al., 2025). Effective destination development depends not only on multi-actor partnerships but also on the coordination of institutional roles, responsibilities, and legitimacy across sectors (Sampieri & Mazzetto, 2025). This point is reinforced by Frangkoudi and Gritzali (2026), who show that regeneration outcomes are shaped by institutional logics of different managing authorities, with implications for participation, inclusion, and destination identity.

Several studies show that stakeholder inclusion can remain uneven, selective, or contested, especially where formal consultation is not matched by meaningful representation in decision-making (Paddison & Hall, 2023). The findings also show that participation does not translate instantly into empowerment; it also depends on interaction between formal authority and local legitimacy. Furthermore, public institutions may provide mandates, funding, and regulatory backing, but implementation depends heavily on destination-level mediation and actors' trust (Hall et al., 2024). Tops and Lamers (2024) describe the tension in Boracay, where strong state intervention produced environmental gains but also exposed legitimacy problems when dialogue, recognition, and targeted support were inadequate. This matters because it shows that the quality of collaboration, not its mere presence, determines whether governance arrangements can credibly be interpreted as stewardship.

Destinations are governed through tools such as carrying-capacity regulations, zoning and dispersal strategies, destination management planning, advisory boards, marine protection, community monitoring, public-private coordination, and special planning committees (Wu & Tsai, 2016; Mananda et al., 2025). The literature emphasizes governance structures and instruments rather than evaluation, focusing on actors, arrangements, and tools used to enable change. However, fewer studies address accountability, representational quality, or governance effectiveness.

Implementation Pathways

Implementation pathways are not fixed or linear but staged, adaptive, and non-linear, shaped by contextual pressures such as overtourism, ecological degradation, crises, and institutional strain, which act as triggers rather than determinants (Hall et al., 2024). The Bali case shows a shift from fragmented responses to integrated regenerative governance under overtourism pressure, while Boracay illustrates that crisis-led transition does not necessarily ensure equity or long-term balance (Tops & Lamers, 2024; Mananda et al., 2025). In peripheral destinations, change unfolds more gradually, driven by structural conditions such as demographic decline and weak local networks (Salvatore et al., 2018).

A second pattern shows that implementation is typically preceded by preparatory groundwork, where actors first recognize problems, align stakeholders, and establish planning direction before concrete change occurs. In Aotearoa New Zealand, McKeeman et al. (2026) describe a sequence from consultation and value-setting to strategy formation, engagement, indicator design, monitoring, and iterative renewal. Similarly, Salvatore et al. (2018) outline a transition from strategic problem structuring to tactical networking and agenda-building, followed by operational project development. Across studies, this early phase consistently emphasizes the need to build shared direction, legitimacy, and coordination capacity before transition can move beyond intention.

The review indicates that regenerative implementation unfolds through iterative learning, adaptation, and experimentation rather than a single transition. In marine ecotourism, pathways typically progress from community mobilization and partnership-

building to restoration activities, legal protection, and stewardship-based visitor experiences (Ferretti et al., 2023). Similarly, destination change involves experimentation, pathway competition, scaling, and eventual stabilization (Hall et al., 2024). In South Penghu, implementation begins with understanding stakeholder perceptions and strengthening human, social, and physical capacities (Wu & Tsai, 2016). However, institutional inertia, power structures, and limited practical tools often constrain progress (Cave et al., 2022). Together, these studies suggest that successful implementation depends on both sequential development and the capacity of actors and institutions to sustain change.

Durability emerges when early experimentation is embedded into planning, regulation, and governance routines. In Bali, this is supported by participatory governance, carrying-capacity enforcement, zoning, dispersal strategies, and eco-certification, while in Sanur it appears through policy–spatial alignment, master planning, adaptive reuse, green technology, and stakeholder participation (Mananda et al., 2025; Pranajaya et al., 2025). In Aotearoa New Zealand, value-based aspirations require mandates, resources, and indicator systems to translate into sustained practice (McKeeman et al., 2026). However, transitions are not linear or irreversible and may stall or regress due to power imbalances, weak coordination, limited legitimacy, or resource constraints (Hall et al., 2024; Tops & Lamers, 2024).

Measurable Outcomes and Indicators

Outcome measurement is one of the least developed areas in the review, with most studies relying on proxy indicators, qualitative descriptions, or proposed metrics rather than robust, comparable destination-level systems. The Bali study is the clearest exception, operationalizing sustainability across economic, sociocultural, and environmental dimensions and applying the Analytic Hierarchy Process (AHP) to prioritize overtourism mitigation strategies (Mananda et al., 2025). In Aotearoa New Zealand, evaluation is framed through a wellbeing-oriented approach, with ongoing exploration of indicators and critique of conventional tourism metrics (McKeeman et al., 2026). The restorative marine ecotourism case identifies ecological and community outcomes but does not formalize them into a destination-wide indicator system (Ferretti et al., 2023). The literature is clearer on what should be measured than on how to measure outcomes in a rigorous and transferable way.

When outcomes domains are discussed, they usually extend well beyond conventional tourism performance. In Bali, the focus is tied to overtourism mitigation and triple-bottom-line sustainability effects (Mananda et al., 2025). In Aotearoa New Zealand, the discussion opens out toward community wellbeing, inclusion, local values, and broader social benefit, while also questioning whether visitor numbers and economic return can still function as sufficient markers of success (McKeeman et al., 2026). Other studies widen the picture further by drawing attention to justice, legitimacy, stakeholder voice, accessibility, heritage preservation, and community identification with place as evaluatively important outcome domains (Montealegre, 2019; Paddison & Hall, 2023; Pranajaya et al., 2025). These are important contributions, but it is still better to read as evidence of kinds of outcomes that matter than as a ready-made indicator framework that can be applied consistently across destinations.

A recurring pattern is the reliance on descriptive or proxy-based evidence rather than structured regenerative measurement systems. The Tutukaka case reports outcomes such as community engagement, environmental awareness, place connection, and knowledge production, but these remain qualitative and lack destination-level indicators (Ferretti et al., 2023). Likewise, Kaikōura and South Penghu highlight resilience, collaboration, self-organization, and livelihood engagement without translating them into comprehensive indicator frameworks (Wu & Tsai, 2016; Hall et al., 2024). Other studies continue to rely on conventional proxies such as tourism density, bed numbers, competitiveness, infrastructure, and accessibility. While useful, these measures do not adequately capture socio-ecological and governance dimensions. Consequently, the key gap is not defining

desirable regenerative outcomes, but developing a coherent, transferable, and empirically robust destination-level framework that integrates ecological restoration, community wellbeing, justice, governance quality, and tourism-system performance.

Practical Destination Application and Integrative Stewardship Framework

The practical value of the reviewed literature lies in identifying transferable principles rather than a universal model. Regenerative and stewardship-oriented transitions are shaped by local contexts, governance arrangements, stakeholder relationships, and place-based values, as illustrated by cases from Bali, Aotearoa New Zealand, and restorative marine ecotourism (McKeeman et al., 2026). Surfing tourism studies further demonstrate small-scale alternatives that prioritize place-based value over extractive growth (Ruttenberg, 2023). Collectively, the literature suggests that destinations must redefine success beyond growth by emphasizing restoration, cultural revitalization, participation, carrying capacity, and well-being, while evidence from Boracay shows that environmental interventions alone are insufficient without fairness and local dialogue (Ferretti et al., 2023; Tops & Lamers, 2024).

A second implication is that strategic ambition is insufficient without governance capacity. Destination transition depends on sustained coordination among public, private, community, and knowledge actors without undermining legitimacy (Mananda et al., 2025; McKeeman et al., 2026). In Bali, this is reflected in cross-sector collaboration, community co-creation, and enforceable mechanisms, while Aotearoa New Zealand combines national direction with regional discretion and place-based planning. The marine ecotourism case emphasizes trusted relationships, local initiative, experimentation, and protection of collaborative arrangements (Ferretti et al., 2023). These studies show that governance quality determines whether transition gains traction, coordination is sustained, and change is durable.

A third implication is that destination transition should be understood as a phased and adaptive process rather than a one-off intervention. The literature shows that change is typically built through diagnosis, coalition-building, capacity development, experimentation, and incremental embedding over time (Hall et al., 2024; McKeeman et al., 2026). South Penghu highlights the importance of early capacity building and recognizing diverse actor positions before expansion, while peripheral rural studies emphasize slow activation of local resources and networks (Wu & Tsai, 2016; Salvatore et al., 2018). Cases from Andalusia, Sanur, and Naro further reinforce that staged implementation, adaptive design, and incremental intervention are more feasible than rigid transformation packages in complex destination contexts (Nicolini et al., 2025; Pranajaya et al., 2025; Puig-Cabrera & Foronda-Robles, 2025).

A final implication is that the destination application requires both place-sensitive adaptation and broader evaluation approaches. Mar Menor, Naro, and Zimbabwe demonstrate the need to ground responses in local fragility, heritage value, livelihood structures, and governance constraints (Montealegre, 2019; Musavengane, 2018; Nicolini et al., 2025). While Aotearoa New Zealand highlights the importance of stronger monitoring systems for assessing wellbeing- and value-based outcomes (McKeeman et al., 2026). Across the studies, five recurring principles emerge: redefining destination purpose, strengthening governance capacity, implementing adaptively, tailoring to place, and extending evaluation beyond conventional tourism metrics. These principles form a flexible logic for application rather than a universal model.

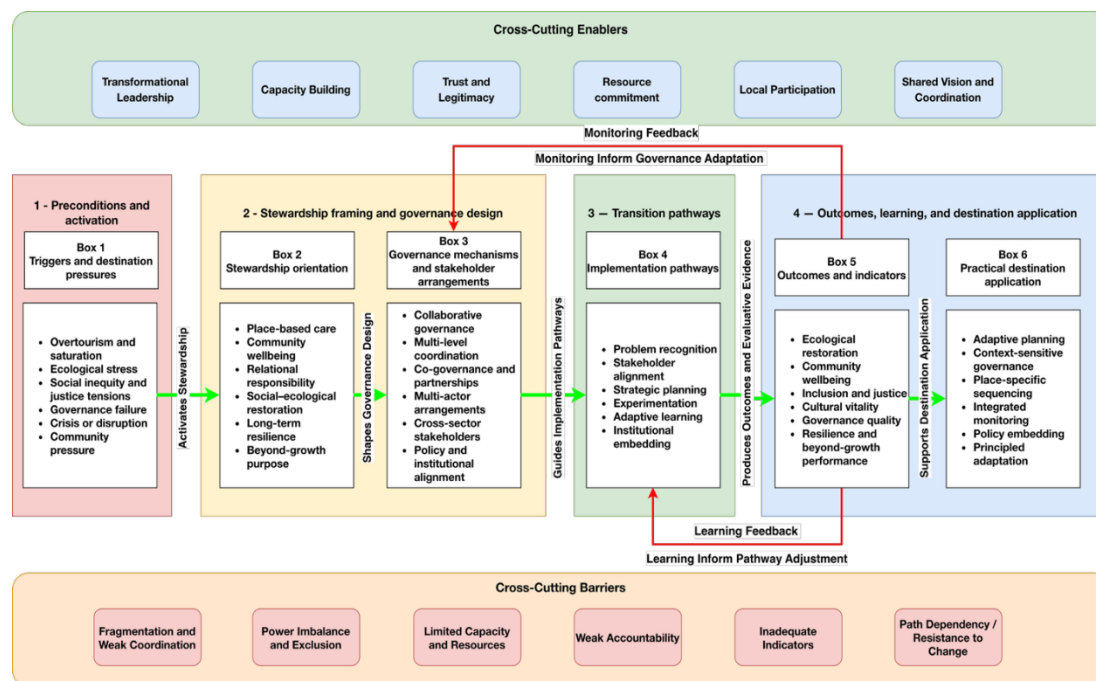


Figure 2. Analytical Framework for Destination Stewardship in Regenerative Tourism Transitions

Figure 2 shows that destination transition is not linear, but contingent and uneven, shaped by enabling conditions and constraints such as leadership, legitimacy, participation, institutional capacity, and resources, as well as fragmentation, exclusion, weak accountability, and limited evaluation tools. The framework captures this adaptive logic, where monitoring and learning feed back into governance adjustment, pathway refinement, and shifting priorities over time. Rather than a single model or completed policy cycle, regenerative transition emerges as an ongoing process of interpreting pressures, coordinating actors, testing responses, and continuously revising direction.

DISCUSSION

The extant literature indicates that destination stewardship is best understood not as a fixed or fully settled concept, but as a place-based, multi-actor governance orientation through which regenerative tourism is increasingly interpreted at the destination level. Rather than being consistently defined, stewardship is more often implied and expressed through recurring themes such as community wellbeing, ecological restoration, cultural continuity, local accountability, and long-term responsibility for place (Ferretti et al., 2023; Mananda et al., 2025; McKeeman et al., 2026). Across the reviewed studies, this framing positions stewardship as a bridge between regenerative aspirations and destination-level responsibility, shifting the focus away from growth- and promotion-centered models toward relational, care-oriented governance of place.

Within this framing, governance emerges as the central mechanism through which stewardship is enacted. The literature by Wu and Tsai (2016), Ferretti et al. (2023), Mananda et al. (2025), and McKeeman et al. (2026) consistently shows that regenerative transition depends on collaborative and multi-level arrangements involving governments, communities, private sector actors, and, in some cases, knowledge institutions and indigenous stakeholders. However, the presence of collaboration alone is insufficient. Evidence from Boracay demonstrates that even strong intervention can produce uneven outcomes when participation is limited and legitimacy is weak, highlighting tensions in justice and distribution that undermine stewardship claims (Tops & Lamers, 2024). More broadly, transition is consistently portrayed as staged, adaptive, and non-linear rather than universal or irreversible, reinforcing the idea that stewardship is a process-based form

of governance shaped by uncertainty and evolving conditions (Salvatore et al., 2018; Hall et al., 2024). In this sense, governance quality, particularly legitimacy, accountability, and institutional capacity, becomes as important as collaboration itself in determining whether the transition is sustained or fragmented.

Despite these advances, outcome measurement remains one of the weakest dimensions in the literature. While desirable outcomes such as well-being, ecological integrity, and cultural value are frequently discussed, they are rarely operationalized into robust or comparable measurement systems. The Aotearoa New Zealand case illustrates both the promise and limitations of value-based indicators, as well-being-oriented approaches are conceptually appealing but difficult to standardize across destinations (McKeeman et al., 2026). Other studies similarly highlight ecological or socio-cultural outcomes without translating them into transferable evaluative frameworks (Montealegre, 2019; Ferretti et al., 2023). At the same time, conventional metrics such as competitiveness, accessibility, and tourism density remain widely used, despite their limited capacity to capture justice, resilience, or place quality (Berdugo et al., 2025; Salvatore et al., 2018). This creates a methodological tension where regenerative narratives advance faster than evaluative capacity, making it difficult to distinguish between substantive transformation and aspirational framing.

From a practical and policy perspective, the review highlights five recurring principles across the literature: redefining destination purpose beyond growth, strengthening governance capacity, implementing change adaptively, tailoring strategies to place, and extending monitoring beyond conventional tourism indicators. These principles suggest that destination transition should not be understood as model replication, but as principled adaptation grounded in local conditions and institutional realities (Ferretti et al., 2023). For destination managers and DMOs, this implies a shift from promotional roles toward facilitation, coordination, and long-term stewardship of place. For policymakers, it requires integrating regulation, carrying-capacity management, restoration strategies, and participatory mechanisms into coherent governance systems that are sensitive to justice and representation. For partnerships, the evidence underscores that governance arrangements are not neutral implementation tools but politically and institutionally embedded structures with real distributive consequences.

CONCLUSION

This review indicates that destination stewardship is emerging as a key way in which regenerative tourism is interpreted at the destination level, yet it remains conceptually fluid, unevenly developed, and not fully standardized across the literature. Rather than a fixed definition, stewardship is expressed as a practical framing of destination change that emphasizes community wellbeing, ecological restoration, cultural continuity, accountability, and shared responsibility for place.

The evidence shows that the field is strongest in explaining governance arrangements, transition pathways, and enabling conditions, where change is understood as adaptive, non-linear, and highly context-dependent. However, outcome measurement remains comparatively underdeveloped, with limited capacity to assess regenerative claims in a consistent and comparable way across destinations. The review therefore suggests that destination stewardship should be understood not as a universal model, but as a set of context-sensitive principles that guide principled adaptation, including redefining destination purpose beyond growth, strengthening governance capacity, implementing change iteratively, tailoring strategies to place, and extending evaluation beyond conventional tourism metrics.

At the same time, the literature is constrained by several limitations, including a small and heterogeneous evidence base, a predominance of qualitative and case-based studies, and uneven representation of contexts with varying governance maturity and tourism pressures, which limits cross-case comparability. These constraints reduce the generalizability of findings, even as they enrich contextual understanding. Future research should address these gaps by refining the conceptual boundaries of destination

stewardship, deepening analysis of governance quality, particularly legitimacy, representation, and justice, expanding longitudinal and comparative studies of transition pathways, and developing more robust destination-level regenerative indicators that integrate ecological, social, governance, and tourism performance dimensions.

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